

# NEWS

FROM THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE



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**TIME IS NOW TO SAVE WILD TIGERS AND RHINOS SAYS FEDERAL AGENCY;**  
**ANNOUNCES FORMATION OF BROAD-BASED PARTNERSHIP**

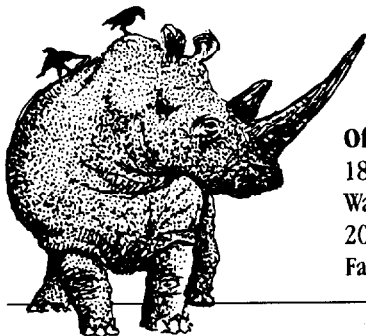
Recognizing that the world's wild tigers and rhinos are perilously close to extinction, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today in Los Angeles launched a first-of-its-kind public education program to tell all Americans that certain products in Asian medicine shops may contain parts of these endangered species as well as toxins potentially harmful to human health.

The Service chose Los Angeles as the focus of the pilot project because the city is home to one of this country's oldest and most diverse Asian communities. Large populations of Chinese, Korean, Cambodian, and Vietnamese Americans live and work in the area.

The rhino-tiger outreach plan features a broad-based partnership among several Federal, state, and local government agencies and the private sector. "The participation of the Los Angeles Asian community has been invaluable to the development of this pilot project," said Assistant Interior Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks George T. Frampton, Jr. "They are committed to protecting tigers and rhinos in the wild by helping us find ways to reduce the sale and consumption of medicinal products.

"We greatly respect the ancient tradition Asians have of using medicines derived from animals and plants. However, the Asian products on the market today are factory-produced patented medicines--a new way of manufacturing designed solely for profit--that may not only be mislabelled but may also be dangerous."

The effort will provide new information to consumers regarding health risks associated with certain traditional Asian products. It will also clarify United States' law enforcement responsibilities regarding endangered species.



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At latest count, there were fewer than 10,000 rhinos and approximately 5,000 tigers left in the wild, ranking these species among the world's most critically endangered. Unless worldwide trade in their parts and products is eliminated, wild rhinos and tigers could be extinct within 5 years.

"Sadly, rhinos and tigers have a price on their heads. We must ensure they are more valuable alive than dead. Today I am issuing a plea to help save these magnificent animals," Frampton said.

Products made of tiger bone and rhino horn are believed by many to have therapeutic powers imparted from these animals' vigor and strength. Frampton explained that, when analyzed at the Service's National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory, the majority of products sold and labelled as containing rhino or tiger parts had no measurable amounts of either endangered species present. What researchers did find, however, were a number of foreign substances and potentially toxic levels of poisons such as arsenic and mercury.

Importation of products containing rhino and tiger into the United States is prohibited under the Endangered Species Act and an international wildlife treaty; nevertheless, illegal trade continues. This demand for products that either contain or purport to contain rhino and tiger parts stimulates poaching of the animals in the wild.

"It is incumbent on us to get the word out that by purchasing such products, whether or not they actually contain any trace of these animals, consumers are fueling the illegal trade. And, of equal importance, consumers should understand that the very medicines they buy to improve their health or that of their families may pose serious health risks."

In an ongoing partnership with the U.S. Customs Service, law enforcement officers from both agencies continue to work together at ports throughout the United States to stop illegal wildlife products from entering this country. The Service has a permanent law enforcement staff of wildlife agents and inspectors stationed in Los Angeles, a major port of entry for both legal and illegal wildlife products.

In addition, a new partnership agreement is being forged that will formalize the working relationship between the Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in monitoring and regulating the importation of these products. FDA is responsible for ensuring that these products do not contain harmful substances, filth, or mislabelled or unidentified ingredients. The partnership will add a new dimension to the effort to safeguard public health and combat the use of endangered species in consumer products.

The Service is also working in close collaboration with the Los Angeles Unified School District, the Los Angeles Zoo, and the World Wildlife Fund on an education element to be offered this school year in middle schools as well as in adult education classes and workshops.

Materials are being prepared that will provide Asian students and their families a fuller understanding of the complexities of species conservation and product use. Teachers will receive training enabling them to explain the health risks associated with the use of medicinals, the laws protecting endangered species and why possession and sale of these products is illegal, and why it is important to conserve rhinos and tigers.

Several non-government organizations are also partners in the rhino-tiger education outreach program. Groups such as the World Wildlife Fund, the Humane Society of the United States, the American Zoo and Aquarium Association, the Environmental Security Network, and the Wildlife Conservation Society are developing complementary programs.

The State of California's Food and Drug Branch is also a Service partner, leading that state's efforts to alert consumers to the potential toxicity of certain Asian medicinals. It is working with the Service to support Section 653(o) of the California penal code prohibiting the sale of endangered-species-related products.

Rhinos and tigers are listed as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. The Act plays a vital role in curbing illegal wildlife trade at home and abroad, restricting both interstate and international commerce in endangered species, and providing the enforcement authority required by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the world's only treaty regulating trade in rare plants and animals.

"The Endangered Species Act doesn't just help protect animals and plants here at home," said Frampton, "it gives protection to some of our most revered species such as rhinos and tigers.

"Moreover, the United States is looked to as an important leader in the protection of endangered species internationally, thanks to the Endangered Species Act and this country's role in regulating wildlife trade. By protecting rhinos and tigers, the United States sends a strong signal to the rest of the world that we take seriously our obligation to protect our children's natural legacy. The alternative--the disappearance of wild tigers and rhinos from this planet in our lifetime--is unthinkable."